

## **Rabies Investigation**

**Summary:** Many local public health agencies (LPHA) deal with reports of rabid animals. Public health response may involve the submission of the expected rabid animal to the state public health laboratory for testing, investigation and assistance with post-exposure vaccination, and ongoing observation of unvaccinated animals. Collaboration with multiple state agencies, county sheriffs' departments or animal enforcement and the prosecuting attorneys' offices is often required.

### **Detailed Story:**

In the early morning hours in rural Cape Girardeau County, a resident discovered a skunk inside their house in the same room as a dog and her new puppies. The skunk was found with one of the pups in its mouth. The resident grabbed the skunk, shook the pup loose, and tossed the skunk out of the room. The startled skunk wanders off, cuddles in with a second dog and set of pups before staggering out to the front yard where it dies with white, frothy foam around its mouth.

### **PUBLIC HEALTH ACTIONS:**

◀**ASSESSMENT** of the situation: The LPHA submitted the skunk head to the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) State Public Health Lab in Jefferson City and it is confirmed positive for rabies. The on-site evaluation by the LPHA reveals that there are an additional 18 dogs housed in outside kennels, as well as a cat and her kittens, all of which could have been exposed; no dogs on the property have been vaccinated against rabies.

◀**ASSURANCE** of services: The LPHA assisted household members, exposed to the skunk, with obtaining post-exposure rabies vaccination; it coordinated, and initiated an eight week on-site inspection and observation of the unvaccinated animals at the home. This required collaboration between the LPHA, County Sheriff's Department, and the County Prosecuting Attorney.

◀**OUTCOME:** Over 200 local public health manpower hours and \$15,000 of local public health funding were involved to collaborate with local partners, DHSS and the Missouri Department of Agriculture, assist two individuals in completing post-exposure rabies vaccination, obtain euthanasia of exposed dogs and pups, and provide public health observation of quarantined outside dogs once a week for eight weeks. All outside dogs were successfully vaccinated against rabies, human rabies was prevented, and the spread of animal rabies was prevented. As a result, policy development is under review for county wide vaccination for companion animals.